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DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY [illegible] DATE 2/27/81
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FEBRUARY 1 1979

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Dear Mr. [illegible]:

I have received your communication of January 5 enclosing the inquiry of Ms. Opal D. Fitchin, your constituent, concerning the Department's response to the Jonestown, Guyana tragedy.

The Department is cognizant of and sympathetic to the plight of the families of the Jonestown victims and has attempted to administer the disposition of the bodies in an orderly and efficient manner. As of January 25, 641 bodies had been positively identified; of this number, 323 had been claimed by the next-of-kin; and 272 bodies remain unidentified. We are continuing to attempt to identify deceased with the assistance of medical and dental records provided by next-of-kin.

The Department has set up a Guyana Working Group which has contacted or attempted to contact all known next-of-kin and has provided those person with information on retrieval of remains and possible avenues of financial assistance, e.g. the Social Security Administration or Veterans Administration. The group was initially staffed on a twenty-four hour basis, seven days a week and is now staffed an average of twelve hours a day.

The Honorable
Phillip Burton,
P.O. Box 36023
450 Golden Gate Avenue
San Francisco, California.

The Federal Government cannot transport the bodies of identified Guyana deceased for burial on behalf of their next-of-kin. Authorization and funds are not available for this purpose and disposition of the deceased is considered to be the private responsibility of the next-of-kin.

I hope you find this information helpful in responding to your constituent. If you have further questions, please call Mr. Jay A. Mizi at 202-632-7111.

Sincerely,

Douglas J. Bennet, Jr.
Assistant Secretary
for Congressional Relations

Enclosures:
Correspondence Returned.

CA/OCS/CCS/ARA:
O'Kane:acm:dg 1/23/79
Control No. 0005-1334

Clearances:
CA/OCS/LMDay LMD
CA/BMWatson
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